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ZOONOTIC DISEASES AND EXOTIC PETS: A PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY ANALYSIS

WA State Board of Health, 10/6/04



INTRODUCTION

- The popularity of exotic pets is increasing
- Many exotic pets are imported from foreign countries to be sold as pets
- Wild-caught native animals are also traded as pets
- The recent emergence of monkeypox illustrates the risks posed by exotic pets



ZOONOTIC DISEASES WORK GROUP

- Convened to address questions arising during and after the monkeypox outbreak
- Examined laws and regulations at the federal and state levels
- Surveyed local health jurisdictions and animal control officers
- Drafted a report and recommendations for SBOH and DOH



ZOONOTIC DISEASES WORK GROUP

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BACKGROUND: ZOOONOSES

- Diseases transmitted from animals to humans
- 60% of infectious diseases
- 75% of emerging diseases



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BACKGROUND: RECENT EVENTS

- Monkeypox
- SARS
- Avian Influenza
- West Nile Virus



BACKGROUND: ZOOONOSES

- Rabies
- Tularemia
- Hanta Virus Pulmonary Syndrome
- Salmonellosis
- Psittacosis
- Herpes B-Virus
- Hemorrhagic Fevers (Ebola, Marburg)
- HIV
- Plague
- Others



FEDERAL PUBLIC HEALTH AUTHORITY AND REGULATIONS

- Section 361 of the Public Health Service (PHS) Act (42 USC 264)
 - Authorizes the Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary to make and enforce regulations necessary to protect public health by preventing the introduction, transmission, or spread of communicable diseases from foreign countries or between states.



CDC REGULATIONS

- CDC regulates importation from foreign countries
 - Non-human primates (42CFR71.53)
 - Small Turtles (42CFR71.52)
 - African Rodents (42CFR71.56)
 - Dogs and cats (42CFR71.51)
 - Etiologic agents, animal hosts, and vectors (42CFR71.54)



FDA REGULATIONS

- FDA regulates interstate (and in some cases intrastate) transactions
 - Small Turtles (21CFR1240.62)
 - Molluscan Shellfish (21CFR1240.65)
 - Psittacine Birds (21CFR1240.60)
 - Prairie Dogs and African Rodents (21CFR1240.63)



OTHER FEDERAL REGULATIONS

- These regulations primarily protect animals, not public health
 - Animal Welfare Act
 - Endangered Species Act
 - Captive Wildlife Safety Act
 - Lacey Act



WA STATE PUBLIC HEALTH AUTHORITY AND REGULATIONS

- SBOH
 - Adopt rules regarding
 - Pet animals (Chapter 16.70 RCW)
 - Communicable diseases (Chapter 43.20 RCW)
 - Rabies rule (WAC 246-100-191)
 - Psittacosis rule (WAC 246-100-201)
 - Others (Chapter 246-101 WAC; Chapter 246-100 WAC)



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WA STATE PUBLIC HEALTH AUTHORITY AND REGULATIONS

- DOH
 - Implementation/enforcement
 - Authority of the Secretary
 - Non-regulatory programs, activities
 - Technical assistance, training, materials
 - Surveillance, data collection
 - Create and maintain collaborative relationships



EXOTIC PETS IN WASHINGTON

- Survey results:
 - 21 local health jurisdictions (LHJ) responded
 - 9 animal control officers (ACO) responded
 - Overall, LHJs and ACOs received few reports of problems or injuries associated with exotic pets
 - Results suggest that ACOs might be more likely to have knowledge of exotic animal breeders and dealers



EXOTIC PETS IN WASHINGTON

- Exotic Animal Breeders, Dealers, and Exhibitors:
 - UDSA licensed facilities
 - 16 licensed pet breeders
 - 9 licensed dealers
 - 34 licensed exhibitors
 - Not all licensees possess exotic animals
 - Some advertise the following animals:
 - degus, chinchillas, short-tailed opossums, Patagonian caviars, hedgehogs, wallaroos, zebras, yaks, Bactrian camels, Nilgai antelopes, watussis, sugargliders, bobcats, lynx, cougars, servals, nonhuman primates, and a wide variety of imported fish, reptiles, birds, amphibians, rodents, and invertebrates



EXOTIC PETS IN WASHINGTON

- Exotic Animal Breeders, Dealers, and Exhibitors:
 - Other breeders and dealers
 - 35 other breeders/dealers/exhibitors not on the USDA list
 - Many of these specialize in birds and/or reptiles and therefore are not regulated under the AWA
 - Some advertise the following animals:
 - mini zebus, miniature donkeys, llamas, Bactrian camels, wallaroos, pixie bobcats, exotic birds, lynx, servals, caracals, Bengal tigers, chinchillas, ocelots, hedgehogs, sugargliders, and Brazilian short-tailed opossums



CONCLUSIONS

- Regulating the exotic animal trade and responding to zoonotic disease outbreaks when they occur involve the cooperation of several different federal, state, and local agencies.
- Many existing laws related to exotic or wild animals are not primarily designed to protect public health and prevent communicable diseases.



CONCLUSIONS

- Federal laws aimed at protecting public health and safety focus on foreign imports and interstate activities. Only two federal laws regulate intrastate activities and those pertain only to African rodents, prairie dogs, and small turtles.
- The exotic animal trade is experiencing increasing volumes every year. The rapid movement and distribution of imported exotic and captured wild animals increases the risk that a zoonotic disease will be introduced to a new population, threaten human and animal health, and become established in native animal and insect reservoirs.



CONCLUSIONS

- The extent of exotic pet ownership within the state is difficult to assess accurately; some sources suggest that it is common. Local public health departments and animal control officers do not receive many reports of problems associated with exotic pets. Animal control officers might have more knowledge of exotic pet breeders/dealers on average than local health departments.
- Washington's laws to prevent rabies and psittacosis are not up to date with current national recommendations and available information.



CONCLUSIONS

- Public health in Washington has both specific and broad authority to prevent, manage, and act in the event of a zoonotic disease outbreak related to exotic pet animals. Within the parameters of these authorities, public health officials can be both reactive and proactive. The authorities granted to state and local health officials appear to be adequate for dealing with a zoonotic disease outbreak, however a clear plan and a process for executing it are needed.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Based on:
 - The conclusions of the workgroup
 - State public health agencies' authority and capacity
 - The need for more information
 - The importance of making zoonotic diseases a public health priority



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop a zoonotic disease response plan
 - The plan should include a working definition of ‘exotic pets,’ a review of authorities and responsibilities, principles of disease containment, and reporting requirements and standards. The state’s Communicable Disease Response Plan may be used as a model. Combining the documents should be considered.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Revise existing rules on rabies and psittacosis
 - The state rules on rabies and psittacosis (WAC 246-100-191 and WAC 246-100-201) should be reviewed in the context of recent national recommendations and changes should be considered.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Give further consideration to adopting a written point of sale education requirement for all reptile sales
 - Responsible reptile handling and hygiene practices should be promoted to reduce the risk of reptile-associated salmonellosis. Different ways of achieving this should be considered including adopting a written point of sale education requirement for all reptile sales. Other possibilities may also be considered. It may be appropriate to conduct this evaluation simultaneously with the rule revisions discussed in the previous recommendation.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Monitor the situation and periodically reevaluate whether additional regulation is needed.
 - Continue to collect information and gain familiarity with the exotic pet trade;
 - Improve existing surveillance and data collection systems such as the animal disease surveillance system being implemented in collaboration with the Washington Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory and continue to work with other state agencies such as WSDA to coordinate reciprocal reporting;



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Monitor the situation and periodically reevaluate whether additional regulation is needed. (continued)
 - Assist local health jurisdictions as needed with increasing their awareness of exotic pets in their jurisdictions and developing regulations concerning licensing or registration requirements;
 - Build stronger collaborative relationships with other state agencies, local health jurisdictions, pet owner organizations, veterinarians, and animal rights groups. Integrate these efforts with those of other programs and activities with similar goals and purposes such as the Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response program activities.



RECOMMENDATION TO THE BOARD

Upon reviewing the contents of the report and considering the recommendations from the work group the Board may choose to consider, amend if necessary, and adopt the following motion:

The Board accepts the draft report titled “Zoonoses and Exotic Pets: A Public Health Policy Analysis” and the recommendations of the work group. The Board directs the staff to revise the draft as necessary and appropriate. At the end of the process, the Chair is authorized by the Board to approve a final draft.

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